



A Competency Framework for Governance

The knowledge, skills and behaviours needed for effective governance in maintained schools, academies and multi-academy trusts

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Foreword

The importance and significance of outstanding governance and leadership across our education system, in every school in England, has never been greater. The role of governing boards in defining and implementing strategy whilst holding the leaders of schools and trusts to account has to be the foundation upon which a world class education system is built. Governors or trustees who work as a team, who are able to bring their skills and experience to the role and who blend challenge and support to hold their workforce to account, will improve standards.

Our shared ambition is to ensure that there are enough good school places for every child in England. What we have attempted to do in this *Competency Framework for Governance* is to define more clearly the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed for governance to play its full part in this vision.

The development of this framework was informed by great practice, evidence of what governance at its best can deliver and a deep understanding of the role that clarity of vision, purpose and action contributes to school improvement.



Sir David Carter

National Schools Commissioner for England

Introduction

Effective governance provides strategic direction and control to schools, academies and Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs). It creates robust accountability, oversight and assurance for their educational and financial performance and is ambitious for all children and young people to achieve the very best outcomes.

About this framework

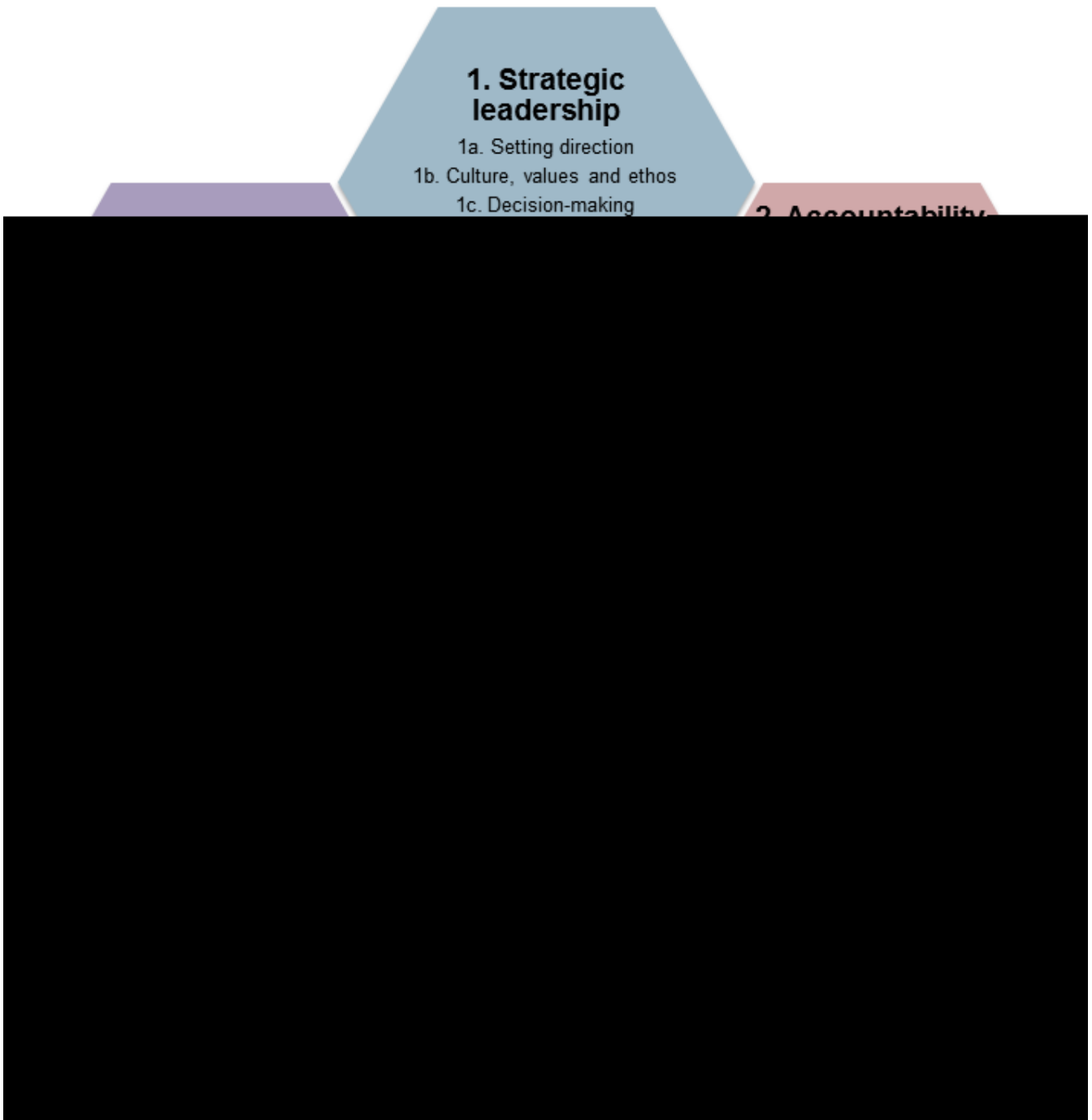
The framework sets out the competencies needed for effective governance. It is non-statutory guidance and should be read alongside the [Governance Handbook](#), particularly the section explaining the key features of effective governance. Academy trusts should also refer to the [Academies Financial Handbook](#).

The framework is applicable to all boards in proportion to the scale and complexity of the organisation they are governing. Boards will need to consider which knowledge and skill areas outlined in the framework are most important for their context. They will also need to determine the extent to which it applies to any committees they have appointed, including within multi-academy trusts to any local governing bodies, depending on the range of functions delegated to them.

The framework does not aim to apply specifically

A competency framework for governance

The framework is made up of 16 competencies underpinned by a foundation of important principles and personal attributes. The competencies are grouped under the headings of the six features of effective governance, which are set out in the [Governance Handbook](#): strategic leadership; accountability; people; structures; compliance and evaluation.



Principles and personal attributes

The principles and personal attributes that individuals bring to the board are as important as their skills and knowledge. These qualities enable board members to use their skills and knowledge to function well as part of a team and make an active contribution to effective governance.

All those elected or appointed to boards should fulfil their duties in line with the seven principles of public life (the [Nolan principles](#)). They should also be mindful of their responsibilities under equality legislation, recognising and encouraging diversity and inclusion. They should understand the impact of effective governance on the quality of education and on outcomes for all children and young people. In addition, all those involved in governance should be:

- Committed** Devoting the required time and energy to the role and ambitious to achieve best possible outcomes for young people. Prepared to give time, skills and knowledge to developing themselves and others in order to create highly effective governance.
- Confident** Of an independent mind, able to lead and contribute to courageous conversations, to express their opinion and to play an active role on the board.
- Curious** Possessing an enquiring mind and an analytical approach and understanding

Skills and effective behaviours

- thinks strategically about the future direction of the organisation and identifies the steps needed to achieve goals.
- leads the board and executive leaders in ensuring operational decisions contribute to strategic priorities
- adopts and strategically leads a systematic approach to change management, that is clear, manageable and timely
- provide effective leadership of organisational change even when this is difficult

1b. Culture, values and ethos

The knowledge and skills required to set the culture, values and ethos of the organisation successfully; demonstrate these in the conduct and operation of the board; embed them through the whole organisation; and monitor the impact on outcomes for children and young people and on the reputation of the organisation in the wider community.

Everyone on the board

Knowledge

- the values of the organisation and how these are reflected in strategy and

1c. Decision-making

Boards which operate effectively as strategic decision-makers are able to provide the foundation for creativity, innovation and improvement in the organisation. Effective decision-making is about moving from free and frank discussion to specific, measurable actions.

The chair

- consider how to tailor their communications style in order to build rapport and confidence with stakeholders
- is proactive in seeking and maximising opportunities for partnership working where these are conducive to achieving the agreed strategic goals
- is proactive in sharing good practice and lessons learned where these can benefit others and the organisation
- demonstrates how stakeholder concerns and questions have shaped board discussions if not necessarily the final decision
- when appropriate, seeks external professional advice, knowing where this advice is available from and how to go about requesting it

1e. Risk management

Effective boards play a key role in setting and managing risk appetite and tolerance. They are able to ensure that risks are aligned with strategic priorities and improvement plans and intervention strategies provide a robust framework for risk management. These competencies enable those on the board to identify, evaluating and prioritise organisational risks and ensure appropriate action is taken to mitigate against them.

Everyone on the board

The chair

Skills and effective behaviours

- leads the board and challenges leaders appropriately in setting risk appetite and tolerance

ensures that the board is kept up to date on organisational risks and

undertakes scrutiny of risk management plans

- leads by example to avoid, declare and manage conflicts of interest

2. Accountability for educational standards and financial performance

Why it's important: The

Everyone on the board

- questions leaders on how the in-school assessment system in use effectively supports the attainment and progress of all pupils, including those with a Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND)

Someone on the board

Knowledge

- the requirements relating to the education of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- the requirements relating to the safeguarding of children in education including the Prevent duty
- the duties and responsibilities in relation to health and safety in education

Skills and effective behaviours

- Is confident in their challenge to executive leaders on strategies for monitoring and improving the behaviour and safety of pupils/students

2b. Rigorous analysis of data

Board members are required to develop specific knowledge to allow the monitoring of school performance and improvement. It will also assist them in holding leaders to account.

Everyone on the board



Everyone on the board

Someone on the board

Knowledge

- human resource (HR) education policy and the organisation's processes in relation to teachers' pay and conditions and the role of governance in staffing reviews, restructuring and due diligence

Skills and effective behaviours

- monitors the outcome of pay decisions, including the extent to which different groups of teachers may progress at different rates and checks processes operate fairly

The chair

Knowledge

- the process and documentation needed to make decisions related to leadership appraisal

Skills and effective behaviours

- is confident and prepared in undertaking leadership appraisal
- is able to explain to the board their proposals on leadership pay awards for approval

2f. External accountability

This section is about managing the organisation's relationship with those who have a formal or informal role in holding it to account. It enables the board to use their skills and knowledge confidently and effectively to be accountable for the delivery of the organisation's strategic plan, their own decision-making and their oversight of executive leaders.

Everyone on the board

Knowledge

- the purpose, nature and processes of formal accountability and scrutiny (e.g. DfE, Ofsted, EFA etc.) and what is required by way of evidence
- the national performance measures used to monitor and report performance – including the minimum standards that trigger eligibility for intervention

Skills and effective behaviours

- ensures appropriate structures, processes and professional development are in place to support the demands of internal and external scrutiny
- values the ownership that parents and carers and other stakeholders feel about 'their school' and ensures that the board makes itself accessible and answerable

The chair

Skills and effective behaviours

- is confident in

The chair

Knowledge

- the importance of succession planning to the ongoing effectiveness of both the board and the organisation

Skills and effective behaviours

- ensure that everyone understands why they have been recruited and what role they play in the governance structure
- ensures new people are helped to understand their non-executive leadership role,

4. Structures

Why it's important? Understanding and designing the structures through which governance takes place is vital to avoid unclear and overlapping responsibilities that can lead to dysfunctional or ineffective governance arrangements.

4a. Roles and responsibilities

Everyone on the board
Knowledge
<ul style="list-style-type: none">the role, responsibilities and accountabilities of the board, and its three core functionsthe strategic nature of the board's role and how this differs from the role of executive leaders and what is expected of each otherIn academy trusts, the role and powers of Members and how these relate to those of the boardthe governance structure of the organisation and particularly how governance functions are organised and delegated, including where decisions are madehow the board and any committees (including local governing bodies in a MAT) are constituted
Skills and effective behaviours
<ul style="list-style-type: none">able to contribute to the design of governance and committee structures that are fit for purpose and appropriate to the scale and complexity of the organisationable to adapt existing committee structures as necessary in light of learning/experience including evaluation of impact

The chair
Knowledge
<ul style="list-style-type: none">the importance of their non-executive leadership role, not just in their current position but in terms of their contribution to local and, where appropriate, national educational improvement priorities
Skills and effective behaviours
<ul style="list-style-type: none">lead discussions and decisions about what functions to delegate

5. Compliance

Why it's important: to ensure all those involved in governance understand the legal frameworks and context in which the organisation operates and all of the requirements with which it must comply.

5a. Statutory and contractual requirements

Everyone on the board
Knowledge
<ul style="list-style-type: none">the legal, regulatory and financial requirements on the boardthe need to have regard to any statutory guidance and government advice including the Governance Handbookthe duties placed upon them under education and employment legislation, and, for academy trusts, the Academies Financial Handbook and their funding agreement(s)the articles of association or instrument of government and where applicable, the Trust Deedsthe Ofsted inspection/regulatory frameworkwhere applicable³, denominational inspection carried in accordance with s.48 of the Education Act 2005the board's responsibilities in regard to Equalities and Health and Safety legislationduties relating to safeguarding, including the Prevent Duty; duties related to special education needs and disabilities (SEND); and duties related to information, including in the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000the school's whistleblowing policy and procedures and any responsibilities of the board within itthe importance of adhering to organisation policies e.g. on parental complaints or staff discipline issues
Skills and effective behaviours
<ul style="list-style-type: none">is able to speak up when concerned about non-compliance where it has not been picked-up by the board or where they feel it is not being taken seriouslyexplain the board's legal responsibilities and accountabilitiesis able to identify when specialist advice may be required

³ This is relevant to any voluntary or foundation school and any academy in England designated under s.69(3) of School Standards and Framework Act 1998

6. Evaluation

Why it's important: Monitoring the boards effectiveness is a key element of good governance. The board needs to assess its effectiveness and efficiency and ensure ongoing



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